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PROTECTING SENIORS, VETERANS, AND CONSUMERS

SOCIAL SECURITY AND WORKER'S COMPENSATION

The General Assembly acted this session to protect working people over the age of 65. Prior to this year, injured workers eligible for workers' compensation who received Social Security had their retirement benefit deducted from their compensation award. This offset harmed those senior citizens who, in most cases, were in the workplace because their Social Security benefits were insufficient to support them. We ensured that a senior citizen injured on the job will be eligible for all of his or her rightful workers' compensation benefits.

DISABLED VETERANS' PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION

This bill excludes veterans' disability payments when determining income for purposes of income-based property tax exemptions for veterans, the blind, and people with total disabilities. State-mandated exemptions are granted through two statutes; one requires towns to give all qualified applicants a basic \$1,000 property tax exemption, and the other requires towns to give veterans who get the basic exemption an additional exemption, the amount of which depends on their income. This legislation excludes the disability payments as a source of income when determining these exemptions. It also requires towns to give a \$1,000 property tax exemption to people who are totally disabled and people who are blind.

TELEPHONE RECORD CONFIDENTIALITY

This year, we passed legislation to protect consumers from having their telephone records sold, obtained, or received without their consent. We also established fines for violating this law.



Representative Steve Fontana
Legislative Office Building, Room 3902
Hartford, CT 06106-1591



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State Representative STEVE FONTANA

2006 Legislative Bulletin Serving North Haven

THE STATE BUDGET: MAKING PROGRESS FOR CONNECTICUT

In February, the Governor proposed a budget that, once again, underfunded priorities that Connecticut residents overwhelmingly support. We responded by assembling a fair, balanced, and reasonable budget that, among other things, increased town aid.

Sadly, the Governor refused to agree to use a substantial portion of our unexpectedly large operating surplus to help towns reduce property tax burdens. We therefore reached an agreement with her on a budget that, while providing far less municipal aid than we wanted, nevertheless made progress in several areas.

First, we used that operating surplus to give residents and businesses some tax relief. To help businesses, we began the phase-out of the property tax on manufacturing machinery, and eliminated the corporate tax surcharge for 2007. To help homeowners with rising property taxes, we increased the property tax credit on the state income tax for 2007 by \$100 to \$500.

Second, we used that operating surplus to make investments that improve Connecticut's long-term fiscal situation. Specifically, we fully funded our teachers' retirement fund for the biennium, paid down long-term debt, and shored up our Rainy Day Fund. Taxpayers will reap substantial long-term savings from these initiatives.

Finally, we used as much of that operating surplus as we could to help municipalities. From the budget, North Haven will receive directly a general state aid increase of roughly \$40,000 and a special education increase of \$105,000, both of which significantly exceed what the Governor originally proposed giving us. We also will receive the benefit of an increase in the real estate conveyance tax that we extended for another year, which annually brings the town a few hundred thousand dollars in additional revenue. Last, North Haven will receive \$600,000 in state funding for drainage assistance to Todd Drive and other heavily impacted areas of town.

Dear Friends:

This year, House Democrats continued leading the effort to move our state forward. In February, we unveiled our annual agenda, which outlined our priorities: property tax relief, transportation investments, economic development, health care, energy costs, and children's issues. We then crafted legislation to meet these priorities.

From adjusting our budget, to bills on school nutrition, to telephone record privacy, we passed laws in many areas that put average citizens and their families first.

While we unfortunately did not have sufficient time to address the causes of high energy costs before our session ended, I worked hard this year to assemble a bill that can serve as the basis for a comprehensive long-term state energy policy. I remain optimistic that we will conduct a special session sometime before this coming winter to act on it.

This newsletter discusses many of our achievements. If you would like more information on these or any of our efforts, please call me at 1-800-842-8267 ext. 0182.

As always, I am proud to serve as your State Representative. Please call me at 234-2240 anytime, or visit me at www.stevefontana.com, if you need help with any state issue.

Best wishes,

Steve Fontana

P.S. For informative interviews with state legislators, look for my cable TV show "Politics & People" on NHTV!

IMPROVING OUR CHILDREN’S FUTURES

SCHOOL BULLYING POLICIES

To reduce bullying among school children, we passed comprehensive legislation that:

- Expands the definition of bullying to include harassment that occurs on a school bus
- Strengthens local policies to enable students to report bullying acts anonymously
- Requires local policies to offer case-by-case interventions, including counseling
- Enables local policies to address bullying that occurs off school grounds
- Increases parental notification of bullying incidents



Representative Steve Fontana and Senator Len Fasano visit with students from Clintonville School at the State Capitol.

HEALTHY FOOD AND BEVERAGES

We responded to the growing obesity epidemic by passing the toughest law in the nation to reinforce healthy eating habits at schools. The bill bans the sale of soda and sugary beverages in school, and offers schools financial incentives to provide healthy food for purchase by students. The bill also restricts the types of beverages sold in school at school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, and fundraising activities.

UNDERAGE DRINKING

This year, we passed legislation to help responsible parents who work hard to teach their children to abstain from alcohol. Adults now may not supply alcoholic beverages to minors or permit minors to possess alcohol, unless they do so in their own home to their own children.

SAFEGUARDING OUR ENVIRONMENT

ENCROACHMENT ON OPEN SPACE LANDS

Given the importance of preserving public land (like Peter’s Rock here in town), we took steps this year to protect our state’s natural heritage by addressing the serious problem of persons who encroach upon public open space by installing buildings, driveways, and even swimming pools on that land. This bill supports land trusts and park associations by authorizing anyone with a property interest to take legal action against a violator.



CLEAN CAR LABELING

We also made progress in improving air quality by creating a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions labeling program. Beginning with the 2009 model year, any new motor vehicle sold or leased in Connecticut will be scored by comparing that vehicle’s GHG emissions to those of other vehicles of the same model year and the average GHG score within its vehicle class. This legislation will empower consumers to help meet our state goals for lowering noxious greenhouse gas emissions.

UPGRADING OUR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM



Seizing a once-in-a-generation opportunity, we passed legislation this year that will invest billions over the next decade to overhaul Connecticut’s aging transportation infrastructure. Along with reining in high energy costs, this is the single biggest thing we can do to promote long-term job creation and economic development in Connecticut.

The Roadmap For Connecticut’s Economic Future includes many highway and mass transit projects along Interstates 91, 95, and 84. Implementing this plan will upgrade our transportation infrastructure through strategic investments that reduce congestion statewide, enhance transit and interconnectivity, and encourage economic growth, without increasing taxes or reinstituting tolls.

In general terms, the bill:

- Creates a \$2.5 billion balanced, multimodal package that increases planning accountability
- Improves coordination and planning across state agencies
- Enhances communication with neighboring states to address regional needs
- Revises our state’s Transportation Strategy Board process by reprioritizing projects
- Supports mixed-use transit-oriented economic development around transit stations

The bill also authorized several important projects in the greater New Haven area:

- New Haven to Springfield commuter rail, including a North Haven train station
- Capital enhancements to Shoreline East and Metro-North’s New Haven line
- A new commuter train station in West Haven
- Road expansion along I-95 east of Branford

RAISING GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

STATE AGENCY LUMINAIRES

We furthered our efforts to reclaim our night skies from excessive and wasteful light pollution by prohibiting the use of state funds for the replacement or installation of outdoor lights on state buildings and grounds that fail to maximize energy conservation or minimize light pollution. This initiative will minimize energy waste, save state dollars, and improve nighttime visibility.



STATE ETHICS LAWS

This year, we closed multiple loopholes in Connecticut’s ethics laws by clarifying and strengthening them. Under current law, a former governor cannot accept employment as a lobbyist for one year after leaving office; we extended that one-year employment prohibition to any business that received a state contract during that governor’s term of office. We also prohibited the governor’s spouse, when acting in an official capacity, from accepting an honorarium or fee for any article written or appearance, speech, or participation at an event.